This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

**Usage guidelines**

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

**About Google Book Search**

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

NYPL RESEARCH LIBRARIES
3433 07480258 2

# THE WOODLAND SPIRIT

## *AN INTERPRETATION*

BY BURNS WILSON

# THE WOODLAND SPIRIT

## *AN INTERPRETATION*

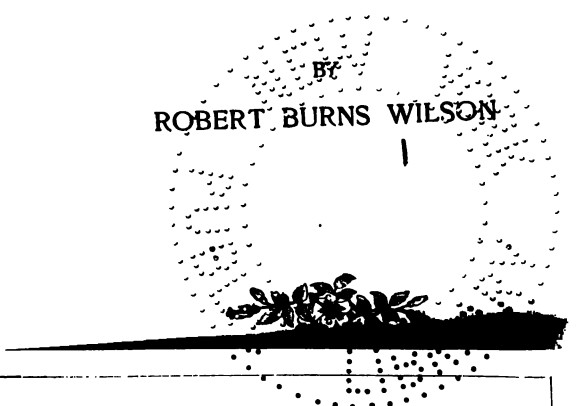
BY BURNS WILSON

55739

811
W

821
811
W50

# CHANT OF
# A WOODLAND SPIRIT

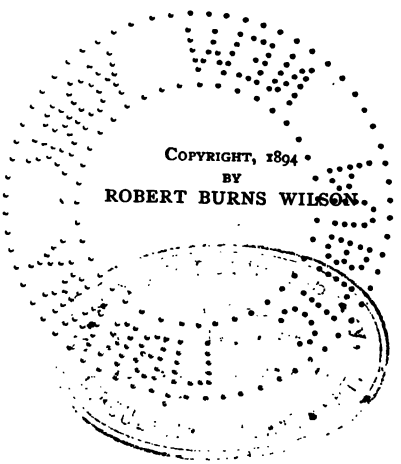



THIS BOOK IS A GIFT TO
THE LIBRARY.

Similar gifts are always acceptable and may be sent to
226 West 42nd Street.

CENTRAL RESERVE

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
538177A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1931 L



COPYRIGHT, 1894
BY
ROBERT BURNS WILSON.

Electrotyped, Printed and Bound by
The Knickerbocker Press, New York
G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS

55739

811
W

TO

JOHN FOX, JR.

THIS POEM IS AFFECTIONATELY

INSCRIBED

22663 W

TRANSFER FROM C. C. MAY 1931

Acknowledgment is hereby made to the publishers of *Harper's Monthly*, and to the publishers of *The Century Magazine*, in which portions of this poem originally appeared.

# CHANT OF A WOODLAND SPIRIT.

IT was the morning of a golden day,
A mild, sweet morning, early in November:
One, in that time, it was
When, through the long, still night, the white frost falls,
Which soon the genial sun doth turn to dew.

I walked alone, amidst the falling leaves,
Along the dry bed of a woodland stream—
Alone, save Sorrow walked beside me ever,
And Memory, dear, with gentle clasp and sad,
Her hand still twined in mine.

I, all unworthy, walked betwixt these twain—
These twain, that have more richer made the heart,
More fed the mind, more curbed the wayward spirit,
More counselled heedless and unwary feet,
Back to the path of hope, than others, all,
That ever on the great round of this world
Have sought the poor companionship of men.

Grave ministers are they, from that strange land
Whose pathless fields the soul doth haunt betimes,
But with such blundering steps that soon we fall,
And straight that world hath vanished like a cloud.

Ah! happy he who makes a friend of Sorrow,
And rests in hope on Memory's thoughtful breast!
But I, unworthy, walked with these, and grieved
As one whom God hath made companionless.

To dream of dreams, to find the soul a dwelling,
Amidst the realm of unsubstantial things;
To pass life's dangerous limit, yet to keep
The sense and semblance of mortality;
To cross the threshold with the heart still warm,
Touch hands with Wonder and, unharmed, return—
For this I sought, and this, in part, I found.

In part, therewith our hearts must be content,
Or here, or elsewhere, be it heaven or hell,
But part of all we dream of we shall find,
Joy or despair,—we never shall find more.

Vain is the art of rangéd words, and vain
The willing numbers,—nothing can enclose

The visions which the startled soul herself
But dimly sees, nor fix upon the page
A record of enchantments, in whose thrall
The heart its fancies, and the world, forgets.

There was the quiet vale, the towering trees,
The endless maze of branches, and the gray
Trend of uneven slopes, sparse-dappled, still,
With pale remembrances of autumn's glory.
The spice-wood bended by the brook, long dry,
And on the air, trance-like, enfolding all,
The spider's long and filmy threads were floating.

The stream sang not, but from the voiceless bed
There rose soft music as of waters flowing :
For there, half-seen, amidst the lacing twigs,
A woodland spirit, leaning on his harp,
Made song in praise of Nature, while his hands
Swept answering measures from the thrilling strings.

Half-faint with joy, I listened, while the fear
Of worlds untried made all the landscape seem
A scene dim-pictured on a swaying veil.
But close I leaned on Memory's tranquil breast
And Sorrow nearer to my heart I drew,
Fain to be mortal still—Earth of the Earth.

Yet, so, scarce knowing if I lived, I watched
That woodland minstrel strike the chords and heard—
Sore straitened of my spirit—while he sang,
In clear, swift-following tones, which rose and fell,
Like jewels tossed by handfuls in the air,
The praise of things myself had sought to sing.

Forgive, Oh Spirit, that I envy thee ;
Forgive the hope which bids me seek thee still.
For oft o' starlit nights my quest me leads
Across the dewy upland of the wold,
Or, at the blurred close of some winter's day,
Breasting a snowstorm on the Benson Hills,
I wend in breathless haste and fondly dream
I see thee dimly through the falling flakes.

Forgive the rendering which, I, here, essay
Of this, a song of thine at autumn-time.

## *THE SONG.*

These be the days !
And like them there be others none on earth,
Nor in the fancy, neither in the dreams,
Nor pictured visions of the sons of men ;
Nor do the glimpses of that after-world,

Which longing souls have imaged to their eyes,
Hold, in their gifts of beauty, promised hope
Of days that are more fair.

These be the days!
When, pale and wan, among the unseen stars,
The waning moon sinks through the sun-lit haze,
That spreads upon the western morning sky,
Like some celestial urn, divinely wrought,
Which angels' hands let slowly down to earth
To lift the soul of Summer back to heaven.

These be the days!
In which the Wind, that wailing troubadour,
Whose soul is in his song, comes by the fields
Of tawny gray, which flank the golden hills,
And by the streams, where stand the wistful willows,
And through the forest, singing as he comes.

Now sinking low
The long-drawn cadence dips beside the marge
Of some dim plain.
Now wild and sweet
The music wakes, and lifts the trailing chords,
All idly dallying with the whispering reeds,
And sweeps the fretwork of the rising ground
In long harmonious swells of melody.

Still higher mounts the theme, and up the steep,
Swift speeds the strident wail among the trees,
Till all the forest shouts exultantly
And all the moaning aisles are filled with mirth.

Then on the level of the painted wold,
That shakes like some wild courser's brindled mane,
The puffing Blast wheels on his whistling course,—
Far through rocking cedars—dragging forth
The heavy tones with strong, resistless hands,
Awaking all the thousand voices up,
Which lurk unheard within that wilderness,
To join his mighty avalanche of song.

Loud, long, and clear, the piercing, utmost note
Cleaves through the thunder of that song of songs,
And scales the crumbling arches of the air.
With deep and trundling echoes, now, it rolls
Against the hollow curving of the hills,
And whirling round the breathless knolls, it sinks,
Down, down, the wonder of the gaping vales,
To sob, subdued, beside the stream once more;
To stir the dead dream of the summer gone,
With gentle rustlings in the russet maise,
And whisper softly, like a lost refrain,

Recalling, sometime, sweet remembrances,
Among the woven willows, dusk and brown;
While, far and faint, a lingering after-tone
Hums through the needled branches of the pines
And from the upland distance, rippling, fall
Soft, undulating murmurs of applause.

Oh! glorious is the Wind,
When he doth rouse his spirit in the clouds,
And wakes the northland trumpet with a blast
That drives the flying snows across the world
And piles the white-maned seas in crystal peaks,
Which echo back the terrors of his voice!

But sweet unspeakably,
When in the spring-time, on the April hills—
What time the white-armed Dawn begins to part
Night's languid curtains from the morning sky—
He dips his shepherd's pipe within the brook,
And wooes the tender leaves to life once more,
And steals the perfume from the bursting buds.

And in the year's full noon,
When that the earth is flooded with the sun;
All laden with the weight of summer spoils,
He wanders slowly down the cloven hills

And by the whispering fields of ripening grain,
With lingering steps amidst the fragrant yarrow,
And rests, at last, beneath the spreading trees.

Upon the cool bed of the dappled clover,
Wrapped in the shadowy stillness of repose,
Lulled by the low voice of the flowing water,
Which laves the meadow's marge, he sleeps anon,
But in his dreams, his aimless fingers move
With listless touches on his chorded lute,
Too faint to fret the slumbering soul of sound,
Whose breathings make the silence musical.

But oh, divine despair!
Heart-breaking rapture, extasy, and tears;—
Sweet bitterness of death, and love's dear sorrow,
Sad thoughts of loved ones lost—soft dreams of hope—
The fading light—the far-off dream of rest;—
All, all are there,
When, in the autumn-time, at eventide,
He draws his harp against his yearning breast,
And stretcheth out his hands, full tenderly,
Upon the million-toned æolian strings.

Then bend the grasses where his feet go by,
Full fain to follow whither he shall lead;

Then from their nests the thistle's downy flocks,
In happy, shining troops, speed by his side;
The nodding throngs, flame-tipped and purple-plumed,
Which haunt the borders of the changing fields,
Strew in his pathway all their treasured wealth;
The golden leaves forsake their stems and fly,
Far-floating, in the charmed, forgetful dream
Which wraps the woodland, and a blissful trance
Fills all the vales with strange, unearthly peace.

Amidst the rapture of the listening trees
There came the stirring of a sudden wind,
Fanning the bright leaves from the rustling branches
So that the spirit, leaning on his harp,
Stood like a picture veiled by falling gold.

Thereat he ceased the song
Therewith, close-following, from the fretted strings,
A few swift cadences made graceful ending;
But for a space
The sweet concordance lingered and the tones
Made replication, soft and tremulous,
Faint-echoing, answering, till the wavering voice
Was slow-enfolded in regretful silence.

As when from sleep's too-well deceiving vision
One wakes, bereft of some great happiness,

And seeks to grasp, once more, the pleasing phantom,
Which fades being touched by life's dispelling hand,
So sought my soul to stay the failing chords.

Beside me, still, my two companions stood.
Dear Memory, whose deep, thought-enkindled eyes
Turned on my own a quick and questioning glance ;
And Sorrow, pale, and, like Athené, tall,
Strong, with a strength beyond the strength of men ;
Pressed nearer, speaking as by right divine.

"I am acquainted with the soul of music,
In Man's behalf, whose vexed, aspiring life,
From hope's first dawn, even to this present hour,
From childhood to the grave, I have attended.
I ask, a little space, that harp of thine,
That here, one of that doomed, unhappy race
May make for me a song. As for the rest
My right, or questions of mortality ;
I am immortal as the gods themselves."

Slight need there seemed for speech ; all noble minds
Hold something fine, which makes true courtesy ;
And he that held the harp, as he had guessed
Her thought, unsaid, made sign with eye and hand,
How all she wished was hers to take, not ask.

For, evermore, these spirits of the forest
Have been the friendly comforters of men.

Then Memory slowly went, with steps demure,
Her soft robe trailling on the yellow leaves,
And in her white arms bore the instrument,
Which glimmered golden, like celestial fire ;
And even with the jarring of her steps
The sacred strings gave forth sweet ringing sounds.

Against my breast she placed the wondrous harp
Which murmured, still, like music in a dream,
I stretched my hands upon the mystic strings,
My fancies mingled with the sounds they gave,
A light from some far shore close-wrapped me round
And in my heart arose
A tempest of emotions ; all the hopes
And longings of my life rushed back to me,
As from some former half-forgotten self,
So that my spirit was borne down, beneath
A settling shadow of profound regret.

Not knowing if my own, or Sorrow's hand
Awaked the chords which, tremblingly, I followed,
I did but voice the madness in my heart
And thus unskilled, the song I lifted up :

O that the glory of the sun
Would never darken on our eyes!
That God's love and man's wish were one;
And earth were nightless as the skies
Which once in changeless beauty shone
On field and stream, where life began,
Before unhappy, banished man
Went weeping, forth from Paradise!

Make haste! Oh dear white wings of Peace, make haste!
Time, on his course, outfly.
Make haste! Oh spirit of Christ's love, make haste!
Speed on the boundless sky.

Speed on the boundless sky. Not yet; not yet
Have we found refuge. Through the waves of space
The laboring earth, grown weary, will forget
To beat her course. The ebbing tide hath set
From future seas, against our dwelling-place.

Haste on the strength of the winds! With the measureless sweep of thy pinions,
Cleave through the limitless ether, the far-flashing comet outstripping;
Haste! for the phantoms of darkness still war on Love's gentle dominions;

Haste! For the sun of our hope in the crimson-dyed billow is dipping.

Pain, for the breast that is sighing;
Tears, for the heart which dieth;
Dust, for the lips that are crying;
Fear, for the soul which flieth.

Be these dear gifts—then life is dear,
And Nature is more wise that we.
Be these gifts dear—how shall we fear
What life's hereafter gifts may be.

O that the glory of the sun
Would never darken on our eyes!
That God's love and man's wish were one.
And earth were nightless as the skies
Which once in changeless beauty shone
On field and stream, where life began,
Before unhappy, banished man
Went weeping forth from Paradise!

Not yet!—O Beauty, on thy shining wings,—not yet,
From earth take thou thy flight!
Not yet—dear dream of happy days,—not yet
Fade from our straining sight!

Stay! fair companion of our loneliness,
Sweet friend and solace of our thoughts, remain
To comfort us in hours of wretchedness.
Spread thou thy realm, for evermore, to bless;
If thou shalt vanish, life, indeed, were vain.

Stay! blesséd soul of the morning, whose robes are the mists of the mountains!
Fair are the prints of thy feet in the vales that remember thy waking;
Spread thy green tents on our hills and be stayed by the songs of our fountains;
Dead are the spirits and dead are the lands that dread not thy forsaking.

Light of the day that is dreary,
Balm, for the mind which aileth;
Rest for the soul that is weary,
Hope of the heart which faileth:

Be these not fair—then death is fair,
And darkness better than the light;
Be these not fair—how should we share
The joy of realms that know not night?

O that the glory of the sun
Would never darken on our eyes!

That God's will and man's hope were one,
And earth were nightless as the skies
Which once in changeless beauty shone
On field and stream, where life began,
Before unhappy, banished man
Went, weeping, forth from Paradise!

No more could I find voice, for round me, now,
A circling host had gathered one by one.
Even as the striking of that instrument,
By mortal hands, had brought them, questioning, there.

Gods, so they seemed, shapes from the unseen world,
Recalling vague impossibilities.
Half-dreamed, wild fancies, moulded from the air,
Whims of the mind in moments of distraction.
Wide-varying as the elements of Nature,
Yet bearing, all, a strange, unearthly likeness,
They stood, and fixed their piercing eyes on me.

What then!—Perhaps the dream was passed, and Life
Had shut the door upon my soul's returning.
I could not tell; so crushing was the sense
Of loneliness, so far-off seemed the world.

What thoughts were hid behind those brows immortal?
What feelings visited these changeless hearts?

'T were vain to guess—conjecture and confusion
Filled with fantastic thoughts my troubled heart,
And with my mind's distress blurred out conception.

Sweet faces, some were,—beautiful—some pale ;
Some dark and scowling—some were wonderful,
With curious clear, great, speculative eyes
Which peered out lustrous through soft-shadowing locks.

But from beneath some broad, unruffled brows
Came star-like glancings, pitilessly keen,
Imparting subtle pain ; as when one sees
Sweet lips—slow-parting in contemptuous smiles.

One mighty figure, wrapped in pallid gray,
Ghostlike and cheerless as a midnight mist ;
Had that in his dim features which proclaimed
His far-off, unstarred, nebulous abode :
So cold the desolating looks he had.

And one, of many, whose fine heads were girt
With scintillating rays, which made one think
They should be spirits from the unnamed stars,
Stood forth a step's-length from his glittering throng,
Majestically robed in silvered azure.
And with clear-ringing, half-disdainful speech
Of startling accent, filled the waiting silence.

"So thus it comes at last;
The races touch with friendly finger-tips,
And, with soft interchange of compliment,
Draw mutual music from the self-same string.
Vain are these false delights!
Soon comes the end of all such vanity."

"Who is this Sorrow? This earth-nurtured creature,
Invading realms that are for us alone?
Despising Time's unalterable custom
She sets no bound to her ambitious steps
In quest of deathless, heavenly things, wherewith
To feed the frenzy of this little planet,
Whose atoms dream of immortality."

"Turn—Ye unperishing, eternal beings!
These mortals are a dull, ignoble race,
Gross, and unworthy of our contemplation;
Mere creeping things, contented in their state,
As we, in ours; they have their dreams, belike,
Rare thoughts of better things, but soon they lapse
Back to the level whence they will not rise;
And, like themselves, so will their visions end,
Vain fancies, planted in dissolving dust,
Unfruitful seeds that spring and flower and wither."

"The primal order will remain forever
This Sorrow, and this Memory, wearing here
A fleeting semblance of divinity,
With this weak race, will vanish utterly.
They are not known among the gods immortal;
Their songs are futile. We alone endure.
Their only refuge is forgetfulness.

"Turn hence! Ye spirits of diviner flame!
The great unswerving law, whose course we aid,
Bids us put on the garments of rejoicing.
Our fadeless beauty, nothing can destroy.
For endless quest, our strength we gird with glory."

Like dagger-strokes, which either kill outright
Or arm with frenzy the unspeeded soul,
Which fears no further wound, so fell these words.

Such words to hear and, hearing, not to die,
Is to outlive despairing, and to dare
The despicable vengeance of the stars.

Gone was the fear, the overpowering awe.
Quick anger overcame the sense of wonder.
From heart to brain surged the resentful blood,
For thought's swift miracle unrolled before me

A flame-wrought picture of the battling world:
Time's limitless dim fields, and stretched thereon,
Life's highway dotted with the perished years,
The wretched pathway of man's baffled soul,
The tragic semblance of once-hopeful days,

The mirth, the music, the proud-beating hearts.
The clasping hands, the forward-looking eyes,
The pressing steps, the never-ceasing toil,
The mingling tears, the undismayed devotion.
The fruitless griefs, the madness, and distress,
The cries, the outstretched arms, the sad farewells,
The closing silence of the wayside graves.

With that consuming vision, as I gazed,
Immortal anguish rose within my heart:
And passionate remembrance of my race.
The wrongs and the unspeakable misfortune,
Bore up my spirit past the reach of fear.
So much can grief uplift the mind—I stood
And watched the threatening magnificence
And circling glory, of the thronging spirits.
As one transported by sublime disaster
Might stand upon a sinking ship, and view
Entranced, the dangerous splendors of the storm.

The cries of all my brothers in distress
Rang in my hearing. Memory, with strong arms,
Held up the harp against my aching breast,
And Sorrow, bending in imperious strength,
Stretched hands with mine upon the quivering strings.
An instant purpose filled me. All my thoughts
Grew into words, and from my burning soul,
In level rage, the numbers rose against,
The undisturbed assurance of the gods,
And thus I voiced aloud the soul's response.

Hear! Ye quick-visioned gods!
Ye fair, immortal shapes, that painless dwell,
Unseen, unvexed, safe in a careless realm!
For fears unshaken; recking not of griefs
To whom the name of death is meaningless.

Ye shall not have to say in after-time,
Ye knew not of the ills which men must bear,
And therefore helped not; for if hope be true,
If life shall hold beyond this mocking dream,
In which I find me, somewhere I shall live,
With words enough, picked from that unknown speech
Wherewith the dead make answer, being adjudged,
To fix the falsehood; should ye, there, deny.

Not for myself make I complaint: I scorn
To joy in good that comes but with base pleading.
Some nobler fate the life within demands;
Some kindlier front the powers of heaven should wear.

Here, not of my own will, I bide, and share
Each ill of man and beast, glad if through pain
Which racks my spirit, I may win the space
Wherein to hurl one thundering message forth
From this death-darkened bourne where helpless hearts,
Too long accursed,—too long shut from elysium;
In silence, and with patient tears, bear up
Against the burthen Fate hath put upon them,

This for their sakes, I dare. Thus I shake off
Fears born of clay—Thus I forbear to think
How I shall fare, in that gloom-shadowed land.
A million souls join cry in my song's voice,
And ye shall hear, though heaven be lost to me.

Hear ye!—ye happy!
Ye, that fulfil the changeless will of Nature.
Ye chaos-wakers! Ye, that made merry revel
About the birth-flame of the eldest star!
Ye singers of first-songs, whose voices rang
Amidst the scenes, dim-pictured, now, in fable.

Ye moonlight mariners, on mist-made seas
Whose head-lands were the clouds which first shed rain
Upon the fields of this fair-fashioned earth.
Ye that saw Eden bud, and, here, this hour,
Helped spread the sunlight on this morning hill.

Ye that can lay the flowers to rest—and smile,
No less at ease, than when ye brought them forth.
Or tinge the leaves with life-destroying beauty,
Blithe, as when first, with tender, dewy touches,
Ye ope'd them to the blesséd April sun.

Ye, that run, tireless, with the breeze, all day,
And find not sadness in the still, dark night;
Nor in the haunted silence of the forest,
Pause, stayed for anguish which ye cannot name,

Ye free,—unchecked—mates of the summer streams,
Companions of the birds—unsorrowing,—
That fling Day's gates apart, in happiness,
When Dawn, her signal scarf waves at the portal,
And, happy, close them when the sun goeth down;
O know ye not, it haps not so to us?
No part have we in all this that is done.

Oh, not in bitterness,
Nor envy, nor mere discontent, nor rage,
Believe it not; from these springs not our cry;
Nay, Beauty builds her wonders not in vain.

Well, we do love the earth—
The strange, forgetful earth whereon we bide,—
With all love's tenderness.
The strange forgetful earth that loves us not
Whereon, in fear, we stay,
Live, through our little day, and build our dreams,
Sad, and in loneliness.

Alas! We love—love, and with breaking hearts
The morning thrills us, and our souls drink in
Regretful rapture from the far-off sky.
We are not all in grossness lulled, nor blind;
Not all unheedful, drowsed by sluggish blood,
Nor dulled by selfish cares.
Like faint remembrance of some fairer world
Love's imprint lingers yet
And strange divinity stays with us still.

The dew-drop on the leaf charms us from sorrow,
The sun wakes inspiration in our souls,

The falling rain delights us, and the snow.
The biting cold we bear, and search for cheer
Amidst the chilly pictures of the frost.

It is not that we love not :—fain, O fain,
Would we be friends with Nature,
We would toil
Through twice ten times the years
Unmurmuring ;
Content to reap but thorns, if we might know
That, somewhere, at the last life would be kind.
Could we but gain some land
Where nature's heart would not call back, as now
Each seeming gift her wayward will bestows.

We ask but love for love
Which, finding not,
Like children seeking shelter in misfortune,
We wrap our spirits in the fading wisps
Of transient, tearful joys ;—well-knowing all,
We play at happiness ; so fond are we,
So fond—so fain to think the dream is true.

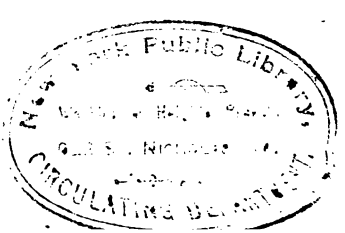
It is not true—the dream—it is not true !
Against the great unkindness of our fate,
Against this unswayed, unregarding force,

Against this dread and unrevealing silence,
Against this Nature's mocking majesty
In fine and glittering panoply arrayed,
I lauuch my cry.

I too have dreamed my dreams—
I too have loved, none more. In her wild paths
I have gone forth alone, and on my knees
In her great gloomy temples have I wept
Unanswered and uncomforted by any.

I have forsworn content—and cast aside
The pleasing joys wherewith men patch life up,
And court delusion in the silken lap
Of smooth convention's vain security;
Nor shall my soul repine that I have lost
The painted fruit, the husks with which the world
Would stay the aching hunger of the heart.

Nay, Nature hath been kindlier, though her hand
Gives but the frosty manna; for the taste
Hath in it something of celestial spice,
Sharp, but untainted, like the wintry heavens.
Therefore is Nature kindlier, but not kind.
Life, and life's best as offering she demands,
And few her favors granted in return.


New York Public Library
CIRCULATING DEPARTMENT

Yet as her ways are strict, and life is dear,
So do I prize her strange, half-dangerous gifts,
Devotion's meagre and hard-won reward.
But with the blade, wherewith she arms my strength,
I will cut out the truth, even though the stroke
Should cleave my own heart, and make vain the hopes
Which please my spirit with sweet dreams of heaven.
Somewhere the truth must lead.—Peace, or despair,
The soul must find, and where truth leads, I follow.

Beneath the flowering, seeming tenderness
Of her loved beauty, which enchants our souls,
And lulls our senses in forgetful ease,
Bides her great steadfast and determined heart:
Thereto we cannot reach. Untouched she keeps
Her fixed, eternal purposes unshaken.
Unfriendly and far-off is her intent.
In her decrees there is no care for us.

Nay, some sad variance makes us strangers here.
Sets midnight shadows in the noon-tide sun;
Plants winter's chill amidst the warmth of summer,
And turns the leaf sere in our spring-time's bud.

Might we but know,
The land, whereto we journey would be fair,
Well-blessed were we in this brief pilgrimage.

Deep grieving fills our hearts
And Sorrow goeth with us where we go.
Because we know not and may never know.

The air we breath is full of whispering fears
To which we dare not listen. All our life
Is shrouded in a cloud. The unaffected earth
Puts forth no sign, in answer, when our hearts
Make soft entreaty, with well-chosen words.
Dark shadows stand about us. Threatening shapes
Arise before us in the way we tread ;
And when the wounded spirit, mad with wrongs,
Confronts them, questioning, their lips are dumb.

Do ye not guess what blighting pangs we bear.
How insecure our purest joys, and how
Dread silence weighs our spirits down like death ?
The hills with longings fill us, and the trees
Bud in our visions of lost days. Our hopes
Blend with the evening clouds. The waving grain
Can wake regret. The scent of mountain pines
May fill our breasts with anguish. Tears will spring
Because the orchard blooms. And if some brook
Makes music in remembrance, dreams of home
Wake in our lonely hearts, and, far away,
We cannot sleep for thinking of the fields.

Mount—mount, my song!
Stand close, dear Memory. Sorrow, lend thy hand.
Be steadfast, now, O Muse!
Droop not thy wings. Not yet have I made ending.
From earth and sky and from the clamoring seas
Pluck thou new rage and, here, out-voice them all.

'T is Nature's way—the mountains have their times
To speak, with fire and death, the burning woe
Which slumbereth long, hid in the earth's deep bosom.

The crashing skies make mock at peace, and rend
The arching firmament with deafening storms,
Unsilenced, whilst their glorious argument
Rolls over us, in dark embattled clouds.

And where hath quiet flown?
When from the unimaginable deeps
Whereto the sun's light cannot reach, awakes
The wild unshackled grieving of the seas?
What fetters make restraint—
Or shall with silence bind the angered billows
When grief's world-shaking voice is lifted up,
What time some secret, long,
Unfathomable, mighty discontent
Hath vexed the loud unanswerable ocean?

Take thee quick heed, O Muse!
By Nature's fierce protestings be thou lessoned.
These be her songs, framed in the giant speech,
Which giveth voice to her unrestful moods.
Let passion's surge bear down all lesser thoughts,
And with tumultuous song make thou reply.
From sorrow's universal heart, break thou
The long-enduring silence of humanity.

Yet farther hear!
Ye deities to Nature ministrant.
No more,—no more
Shall ye strike harp in praise of Nature's glory,
And no remembrance of her banished children
Be mingled with your strains.

Henceforth, forever, the triumphant winds
Shall wake no echo from the answering hills,
Untinged, unburthened, by the soul's lament.

Henceforth, till songs be done,
Ye shall not sing the beauty of the stars,
Nor with the streams make music, nor lift up
Long hymns of mirth amidst the voiceful forest,
Nor praise the undying sun;
But man's deep sorrow, like a slow refrain,
Shall whisper in the spaces of your chanting.

Man ! banished man ! whose soul is made for sorrow,
Even as the flower is formed to hold the dew ;
Child of the passing hour, with no to-morrow—
No yesterday—and no sure haven in view.

Man, marvellous !—the monster—god and beast ;
Sprung from the earth, and dower'd from the sky ;
Life's guest, invited to a poisoned feast—
A prisoner who dreads to be released,
Regretting life, yet unresigned to die.

With feet implanted on the treacherous sands,
Wrapped in the clouds of vague and vain beliefs ;
Vexed with the fruitless labor of his hands,
Alone, among created things, he stands—
A throneless monarch crowned with kingly griefs.

Make way in the silence, make room in the silence of heaven.
Through stars, that afar swing their lamps in the luminous ether.
Build paths on the echoless void, for the flight of our sorrow
Far off in the land of forgetfulness, build us a dwelling,
For sighs and for tears, and for mirth, that is sadder than weeping,
For here, ye attend not, nor stay for humanity's crying.

Make way for the tide of our grief—for the flood that is sweeping
The fanciful structures of ages away on its bosom.
Make way for the soul and the soul's irresistible anguish.
Despair, like omnipotent death, is forever prevailing;
The barriers break, and our woe, like the sea is ascending.
For deep is the fountain, and long are the years of our weeping.

Not waving of palms, nor the musical lapping of water;
Not moonlight, nor fragrance and dew, nor the sun's bright uprising;
Nor breathing of comforting winds from the new-budded forest,
Nor springing of flowers, nor fields that are fair with the summer,
Nor drifting of clouds, far afloat on the sky's shining ocean,
Can quit us of tears and the curse which abideth forever.

In arms that encircle and hold us in love's strong embracing;
In eyes, by whose uplifted beauty our souls are enchanted;
On lips, that are feeding our own hungry lips with their kisses;

In hearts that make warm the fair breasts which our own hearts are pressing;
There dwelleth the dread and the anguish of partings foreshadowed;
There liveth the spirit's despair, and the heart's vain regretting.

The soul which loves most, maketh many the spears for its wounding,
The heart that most buildeth on hope, findeth deeper despairing.
Like Jesus—the—noblest—whose spirit found nothing but sorrow;
The finest are fewest, and fiercer the griefs they encounter.
Make way, through the stars, for our wrongs cry aloud from the battle.
Make way in the silence—make room in the silence of heaven.

Know ye not, oh, ye heedless—or have ye forgotten, in glory
Our race that in wretchedness journeys in shadows and darkness?
How pales your sublimity, basking in easy complaisance,
While under the great crushing wheels of the ages we perish.

Not half so divine do ye seem, as the soul, uncomplaining,
Which weepeth alone, and, alone, goeth out through the portal.

Stand afar from the earth—stand away from the ground of our conflict,
Vex not, with your feet the dear dust, which our blood hath made sacred.
Our blood—which ran red from the cross, and still dropeth forever
From wounds which we bear, that know never a touch of your healing.
Stay afar from the earth—be at peace in your pitiless heaven.
For Christless and cold is the answerless void ye inhabit.

Not on that voiceless shore,
Not far away beyond the summer clouds.
Not on some throne, which mystery enshrouds,
Our Brother dwelleth ;—nay, even as before,
With us, His lot is cast—no bolted door
Doth shut Him in, and no forbidding gate,
Hath He made fast, while He,
On judgments musing, stays, and bids us wait,
Uncaring if we die.

Unmoved to hear the cry :
Arise, dear Lord, and open unto me !
Not there—not there—but here !
Dear to our hearts—in our remembrance dear—
Bides Jesus, evermore.

His righteousness was His, alone.
The love and mercy which were His
Ye know not, and have never known.
Else were this life not what it is ;
A field with thorns all overgrown,
A flame by vexing tempests blown ;
The love, and mercy, which were His
To mortals, ye have never shown,
Else were this earth not what it is ;
His righteousness was His, alone.

What matters, now, to us, the vain,
Vague, and far-off, uncertain weal ?
The late reward for woe and pain,
When pain no longer we can feel ?

While all that harms us waits not thus
Till life, and all life's fears be past :—
For now—unhindered—fall on us
The ills, that conquer us at last.

Not always, can our eyes be blind.
Some time we will throw down the gage
And face the truth. The searching mind,
Which hath mistook, from age to age,
The words, at last, spells out the page.
At last, the anxious soul must find
What an unequal war we wage
For ye have never loved mankind.

Ask ye for proofs?—The great, round world makes answer
Hill, vale, and plain—A million-tongued reply.
Ask ye your questions—even the stony lips
Of monumental Silence, where she stands
Beside the graves of Empire and dead Glory,
Shall find quick speech, wherewith to answer you.

Ask ye the grizzly phantoms of disease,
Which steal by night upon the summer air,
Breathing their poison in the face of slumber.

Ask of the restless billows which obey
The pitiless great spirit of the ocean,
Who keeps close-locked within his deep domain,
The secret of lost worlds and shipwrecked men.—

Question the white-winged death, which sweeps, unchecked,
The wintry stretches of the western plains
Freezing the quick blood in the heart's chilled cells,
Making man's life a mocking desolation.

Get answer from the halting ghosts that move
Across the dusk of some dim battle-field,
Where men, schooled by your merciless example,
Taught, by mere brutal, unrespecting power,
To imitate these savage cruelties,
Have quelled the souls within them, cast aside,
All gentle teachings of the wise and good,
To quench the sod's thirst with each other's blood;
So murdering life to feed the hungry dust.

If these suffice not, let your questions fall
Unnumbered as the showering, countless hail;
The easy answers shall spring up to meet them.
Exhaustless, as the fountains of the deep,
Shall rise the speech of infinite reply.

Call forth the raging spirit of the fire,
That serviceable devil of the pit,
Who serves not, save in chains, and evermore,
Seeks freedom, but to revel in destruction.

Let him make answer, or give leave to speak
The demon of the devastating flood.
Or to the whirlwind's furious, vengeful breath,
Lend ye the power of truth-imparting words.
These shall recount a tale of lands laid waste,
Of human habitations swept away;
Of unavailing prayers and perished hopes:
A meaningless, unneedful, blotted page,
Whereon is writ no line nor word of mercy.

Ask ye the dreary spirit of the drouth
A record of the languishing, long days
When Patience stood afield, from dawn till dusk,
Her aching brows bound with the dusty wreath
Of Summer's faded promise, and invoked,
In vain, the sullen and unfriendly skies;
While from the desert horrors of the night
The famine spectres thronged, to haunt the world,
To lay gaunt hands upon the rattling latch,
And enter, with swift, horrible, light steps
The poor man's door, there by sad hearths, to glare
With dreadful eyes upon the waning store
By hunger saved, and, standing in the dark,
Make ghastlier, still, the painful sleep of want.

These be no myths. No idle fancyings.
No dreams, nor coined illusions of the mind.

These be the unmistakable fierce truths,
Writ on the skies, carved on the changeless rocks,
Told and retold, day, night, and year by year,
Stamped on the features of all men that live,
Signed in the dust with ever-falling tears.

Oh! when, indeed, ye seek to know the truth,
How Nature keeps unchanged her great designs,
Forever still forgetful of mankind,
These shall make mournful and convincing answer.

But should you cast all these aside, and heap
Your proofs of kindness, till the pyramid
Of blessings towered amidst the journeying stars,
All would be vain. Our hearts might join your wish,
With longings ye can never understand.
But all would sink, like ashes in a flood,
Drowned in the silence of one dumb reply.
Behold—the gaping grave;—there is the mouth
Which maketh final answer for all men.
Behold, how mighty that unworded speech.
There is no blast of trumpets heard in heaven
Can quell the inarticulate voice of death.

All argument ends here. All questionings cease,
Until that pit be closed, talk not of kindness.

Until some god shall enter that abode,
As we must enter—trusting in the darkness,
Not knowing when, nor where, we shall arise,
Boast not of courage, for ye know it not.
There is no god hath dared to cross that portal,
Uncheered by conscious power to return.
That anguish is reserved for man alone.

Farewell, farewell!
Depart in peace, dwell ye unvexed forever.
'T is after all but little ye can know.
Did once the bitter cup, which we must drain,
But touch your lips, not, then, as we do now,
Could ye find words to sing the praise of Nature.
Then might ye tell,
How man's misfortune makes his fate sublime.

Farewell, farewell!
Wend ye your ways in the unshadowed fields.
No wish have we that ye should taste distress
The great unhappiness is ours alone.
We, only, know to dread what is unknown.
But, thus, being doomed we yet find words to bless,
Farewell, farewell!
Wend ye your ways in the unshadowed fields.

There Sorrow stayed my hand. I can recall
The rustling leaves, and Memory's dim figure,
As carefully she bore the murmuring harp
Back to the gentle, waiting woodland spirit.
Then all was dark, and sinking to the earth,
I hid my face within my burning palms.

There was a stir, as of departing feet
And mingling voices, dream-like, and far-off;
But nothing did I mark, for passion's tide
Rose, like the ocean, and swept over me.

Alone—with something that will stay forever:
A weird, unnamed, as yet, in human speech;
A hovering essence, which the sentient soul
Perceives in strange and unexpected guise;
A living silence, haunting heart and mind;
A dream, compacted of the countless lives
Through which the soul speeds while an hour goes by;

A kindly presence, which at midday comes
To greet us, floating, as on viewless wings,
Out from the bosom of the summer sky;
Or, stealing through the chill of winter's midnight,
Bends over our unconscious, helpless sleep,
To lay a warm hand on the throbbing heart;

A recompense for tears, a balm for pain ;
A sacred vision, which we do not see,
But know to be ; a steadfast moving spirit
Whose fair, strong hands push on the golden wheel
Of our sure destiny ; whose sandaled feet
We hear upon the path before us, and whose voice
Comes back, unfaltering, through the rushing storm.

Whose touch we feel, even as the heart may feel
A subtle joy in the unfashioned flower
Which fancy sees imprisoned in the seed.

So to the leaf, may be the sunlight's sheen,
A flash of its own inner life revealed,
And, to the stream, the echo of its voice,
The answering spirit of the fallen cloud.

There is no limit to our passioning.
Even as some nicely balanced rock makes known
The deep thrill in the mountain's heart, which feels
The jarring shock of thunders yet unheard ;
So, some heart-piercing thought tells when the soul,
Out-reaching time, lives through some freighted hour,
In the far circle of eternity.

O cheering anguish, comforting distress,
Dear sacred sadness, sweet, divine regret,
Which whispers us of immortality.

Delightful is the rocking of the seas;
The effortless, slow-heaving of the waves,
Which to the raging of the storm succeeds.

Sweet is the solace of the surging calm,
The tempest of emotions being past,
When on the billows of subsiding rage,
High swelling, passionately swaying still,
The tired soul sinks in delicious trouble,
Lulled by unrestful-resting to repose.

Bright are the hours when we are more than mortal,
Dear are the days, when more than life we live;
When, in the wretched loneliness, the heart,
Sustained by strength of madness, buildeth up
A sure, sequestered shelter from distress.

I was content. My soul had voiced her cry,
I had made good my granted hour, to plead,
In answer for my banished race, against
The unaffected insolence of power.
My message was gone forth. Nor life nor death
Could house the words up in dumb silence now.

Far, far upon the dim, unmeasured silence
Was sped, like shadows, that departed host.
From following these my spirit was returned;
Thought from her circling course came fluttering back,
To nestle, bird-like, in the heart's abode.
A glimmering radiance, like the dawn of life,
Assured my vision, and my eyes looked forth
Upon the dear, familiar earth, once more.

The dying leaves lay on the late-sprung grass,
The emerald peeping through the dappled gold.
The mellow sun slept on the autumn hill,
And down the vale the soft-caressing air
Came, laden with the fragrance of the forest.

Pale Sorrow stood, a little space away,
Her steadfast eyes fixed on the far-off clouds;
Her drapery, dark, like woven shadows, drawn
Close round her figure; fine and motionless:—
A pleasing picture of supreme repose.

And, nearer, where her passing feet had made
A little pathway in the rustling leaves,
Dear Memory walked with slow and measured tread,
Her gentle head inclined, her thoughtful eyes
Down-looking on the ground, with her fair hands—

The fingers intertwining—held before her,
Part hidden in the folds of her soft robe.

And ever at the ending of the path,
With half a sigh, a little space she paused
In touching hesitancy, as she turned,
With graceful mien her forward steps renewing.

Beholding these, and their immortal beauty,
Strange comfort mingled with sharp self-reproach,
In my divided heart.

Was I not blest
Beyond all others? I, whose soul might feast
Upon the classic excellence of Sorrow,
Or in the pure celestial loveliness
Of Memory find rest!

Should I repine
Against the fate which gave me these—so fair
I could not choose between—to follow me
Unmurmuring, in all my wanderings?

That loved me, passing well, and evermore
Stayed where my feet were stayed,—these that no lure,
No glittering enticement of the world,
Could lead into forgetfulness of me.

Even with that thought, new rapture and remorse
Sprang in my hungering breast, and nameless joy
Swayed my regretful and accusing spirit.

Cheered by the beauty of the scene I rose
With life renewed, close-drawing to my heart
A sense of comfort from the great gray trees
Which stood in solemn friendliness about me ;
And from the arching sky which, like Love's face,
Looked through the woven branches, whence the leaves,
Frail gentle messengers, came, slowly floating.
And, with them, ever and anon, the sound
Of muffled music on the soft air drifted,—

A slow and haunting strain of melody,
Which waked the longing thought of home. Alas !
How heavily that thought struck through the silence.
I, that am lonelier than the cloud's swift shadow,
Which speeds, unmarked, across the mountain vale,
Dreamed of that semblance, which the heart must build,
Somewhere, in fancy, to fill out the place
Of what is lost, or in despairing, perish.

Stayed by the mystical, faint chords inviting,
I waited hearkening, while the woodland spirit,
In some deep labyrinthine covert hid,
Sent forth a rhythmic chant of measured words,

Which were but words such as the listening soul
Hears in the myriad rustlings of the forest,
And in the limpid lappings of the stream.

Albeit a pleasing power they had, outborne
Upon the urging waves of that strange music;
Which faileth, here, that rougher speech must mar
The flow of that consolatory song:
A song of summer in the happy wood.

### *THE SONG.*

In sacred and solacing shelter and shade; in the solitudes silent and sylvan;
In songs of the sun in the shimmering leaves and the silvery sheen of the water;
In dripping of dews and the whisper of wandering winds and the fragrance of flowers;
In bloom-bended branches, that burthen the balmy and bountiful breasts of the Summer;
In unwithered wilderness ways, where the wrongs and the wars of the world cannot enter,
There waiteth the spirit of peace and of rest for the sorrowing soul that returneth.

Like Beauty and Strength, from their slumbers arising refreshed, for their love and embracing,

So rise the fair towers that stand by the flame-figured
gates of that slumbering city.
There, far from the fretting—the favoring forest hath
fashioned a kingdom enchanting,
With answering arches and aisles that are filled with the
gloom and the glory of ages;
And columns that carry the uncounted years, as a crown
of content and rejoicing,
Uplifting the great swaying world of the leaves, to the
warm-breathing wonder of heaven.

O light-loving battlements, walls, leafy-bannered, assailed
by the gleams of the morning!
The bright, level spears of the sun strike and glance
through the emerald shields of the branches;
The trumpet is blown at the door of the tent, but the
lips of the trumpeter smileth;
And they that awake from their slumber and dreaming
come forth, with a song, from the portals.
O beautiful battle, that blesses and kindles to life by the
friendly assaulting!
O happy green streets of the city besieged by the sun, and
the strength of his loving!

Therein, the young year riseth up from her couch which
is spiced from the pines and the cedar;

Fresh-robed, as an orchard in bloom, she appears, with
the fragrance of dawn in her tresses ;
Advancing with comely and confident steps, for she
loveth the lord of the summer.
Her eyes have a light like the light from a fountain
wherein the sky's image lies broken,
Her voice hath the sound of the music of waters that lave
the starred banks of the meadow,
And lightly she sighs, like the breeze that caresses the
soft, silken leaves of the willows.

There, love maketh gracious the laboring patience of
Nature's renewing, forever ;
The bursting of fettering frosts and the waking from
rigid and riveted slumbers ;
The storms, and the rioting rush of the rains through the
hills that re-echo with laughter ;
The flashing of rays in the wide dripping courts, the
miraculous birth of the flowers :—
That race which springs up from the fresh woodland
loam with the glory of God in their faces.
Divine and unchanged in their dateless descent while the
kingdoms of earth come and vanish.

O nameless, unspeakable triumph and glory, of strength
that is loving and gentle ;

Secure, indestructible beauty and righteousness robed in
the purple unfading ;
Bright-crowned, with the gems of the dew and enthroned
in a circle of life-giving splendor.
O blessed and shadowless land of repose—which the
dream of the Summer enfoldeth ;
The light shall not fade from the green-bladed slope, and
the charm of the trees is immortal ;
Unsullied, undimmed, as the light of the stars in the
fields of the silence eternal.

In sacred and solacing shelter and shade ; in the solitudes
silent and sylvan ;
In songs of the sun in the shimmering leaves and the
silvery sheen of the water ;
In bloom-bended branches that burthen the balmy and
bountiful breasts of the Summer ;
In dripping of dews and the whisper of wandering winds,
and the fragrance of flowers ;
In unwithered ways, in the wilds where the woes and the
wrongs of the world are forgotten ;—
There waiteth the spirit of peace and of rest for the
sorrowing soul that returneth.

Slow, slow and faint, the moving music grew,
And ceased, at last upon the morning air.



538177 A

I could have wept:—so sweet it seemed, indeed,
If one could find forgetfulness and rest;
Might turn away from fretting, and be free
From torturing thoughts, and loneliness, and grief,
For songs unsung and pain of lost endeavor.
Safe, wrapped in dreams and in the summer shade;
Safe from the killing anguish in the heart;
Soothed by the murmur in the summer-leaves;
Stayed, near the gentle trouble of some stream
Which laves, unceasingly, the flowering shores;—
There to lie down amidst the soft warm grass
Unvexed to rest, for ever, satisfied.

Well-pleasing, now, was that consoling song,
Well-pleasing to recall the summer forest
Now that the leaves were golden and the trees—
As though within them dwelt far-seeing souls
Which can not find content in passing joys—
Shook off impatiently their shining robes,
Disdaining to be decked in mocking glories.

And well it seemed, now, hearking of that song,
If one might bide, like that enraptured spirit,
To revel undisturbed in Nature's beauty,
And never dread love's hunger in the heart.

Sweet seemed the picture of that happy land.
And there to dwell—so ran my musing thoughts—
With one I love to love me, evermore.
Then should no heaven devised of gods or men,
Tempt me away from my soul's paradise.

But lacking love life lacketh everything.
Though it were set in everlasting beauty,
Amidst a realm, unfading as the sun,
Girt with resplendent glories, and enthroned
Upon the gathered riches of the world,
With angels, clad in light, for servitors,
All would be nothing. In the midst of all,
From the calm centre of all circling fancies,
The changeless image of unruffled truth,
Like some pale spectre of lost happiness,
Would rise amidst the glittering pomp, and say:

"*Fade, vain and curséd semblances unreal;*
*Where love bides not, the soul of life hath fled;*
*Unloved to live, is not to live at all.*"

Then to gray ashes would the fabric turn;
The vaulted grandeur, changed to dreariness,
Would hedge the wretched soul, as in a prison,

Gloomed, like the dismal corridors of death.
Away, away, with mocking words forever,
The level sword of truth sheers through the net
Of woven phrases, staying the keen point
On one unalterable, fixed decree :
*Man must be blest, in all, else is his life*
*A mimic play—which, eagerly, he watches,*
*Still courting blindness to the imperfection.*

Recalling all the loveliness of Nature,
The friendly fields, the streams, the whispering wood,
I questioned deeply of my conscious heart—
Quick came the answer—and I turned away
Once more, the endless conflict to renew,
To battle,—and to dream of happy days.

To dream of dreams, to make the soul a dwelling
Amidst the realm of unsubstantial things,
To pass life's dangerous limit—yet to keep
The sense and semblance of mortality.
To cross the threshold with the heart still warm,
Touch hands with wonder, aud, unharmed, return,—
For this I sought, and this, in part, I found.

In part. Therewith our hearts must be content,
Or here, or elsewhere, be it heaven or hell,

But part of all we dream of we shall find,
Joy or despair—we never shall find more.

I walked, alone, among the falling leaves,
Along the dry bed of a woodland stream;
Alone, save Sorrow walked beside me ever,
And Memory dear, with gentle clasp, and sad,
Her hand still twined in mine.